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PROGRAM Morning Edition

STATION WETA Radio
NPR Network

DATE March 28, 1986

7:00 AM

CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Interview with Senator David Durenberger

BOB EDWARDS: President Reagan says he's deeply pleased by the Senate's passage of his \$100 million aid request for the anti-Sandinista rebels. Last night the Senate approved the measure by a vote of 53 to 47. The House defeated a similar measure last week.

At a political fund raising stop in New Orleans yesterday the President had harsh words for those lawmakers who voted against U.S. aid to the contras.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: Does anyone really believe that the ruling clique that runs Nicaragua will enter into a serious dialog simply to prove they are good guys? This Sandinista offensive is a slap in the face to everyone who voted against aid to the freedom fighters thinking it to be a vote for reconciliation.

We live in a dangerous world. The lives of the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, the fate of Central America is, to a large degree, in the hands of the United States Congress.

EDWARDS: Late yesterday the President called on the House to follow the Senate's lead and pass his contra aid request. The House is scheduled to take up the contra aid bill again next month.

Joining me now on the phone is Senator David Durenberger of Minnesota. Senator Durenberger is a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and he's one of eleven Republicans who voted against the contra aid package yesterday.

Senator, good morning.

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-2-

SEN. DAVID DURENBERGER: Good morning, Bob.

EDWARDS: Why did you vote against the President's contra aid request?

SEN. DURENBERGER: Because it doesn't solve the problems at the point, as the President has pointed out, repeatedly plagued not only Nicaragua but Central America.

EDWARDS: Doesn't the reported Nicaraguan invasion of Honduras prove the President's point that the Nicaraguans are a threat to their neighbors and that the contras need U.S. assistance?

SEN. DURENBERGER: Quite to the contrary. It only -- it only proves the point that -- that I and others have been making since 1981, when this president decided to make war in Nicaragua, that it could only spread to the rest of Central America.

The President's domino theory is premised on a communist government that eventually infiltrates Texas and even Minnesota and Washington, DC. The contrary, however, is true. It is -- it's the warfare that is being promoted in Nicaragua that is spreading now into its neighbors, which eventually can become contagious.

EDWARDS: Of course, there is some skepticism about whether Nicaragua has, in fact, invaded Honduras. What's your...

SEN. DURENBERGER: They have. They probably -- they have probably been in Honduras 500 times. Our estimates on the Intelligence Committee are (as) many as 800, but people quit counting a long time ago. This is -- this is nothing new. This just happens to be one of the more larger offensives, but it's nothing new.

EDWARDS: The bill that the Senate passed last night doesn't allow the administration to release the \$70 million military aid portion of the funds until July 1st, and then it can only be given to the contras if the White House concludes there's no chance of a diplomatic settlement of the conflict.

Do you think President Reagan is doing what's needed to reach a political settlement?

SEN. DURENBERGER: We would not have had to vote yesterday if the President had been doing what he should have been doing. The President has been telling the American public, for example, that ten times we've gone to the negotiating table and ten times the table has been vacated by the Sandinistas. Quite the opposite again is true.

-3-

We walked away from the last of the negotiations and, interestingly enough, the last of those negotiations was in January of 1985. In other words, the President has refused to talk to the Nicaraguans for more than 15 months, so he hasn't tested the theory of negotiations.

And also, the so-called lethal trigger really gets pulled the minute that the House votes for the aid package, if they do so, in a couple of weeks. Because in the package the President approved last night is millions of dollars worth of what the President calls defensive weaponry, which, in effect, is -- can be anything from Stingers to blowpipe anti-aircraft weapons to machine guns to rocket launchers and so forth, allegedly, for the defense of the contras or freedom fighters, but can easily be used against Nicaraguans.

EDWARDS: You feel a political settlement is possible?

SEN. DURENBERGER: Of course it is. In the -- but the way it's going to get done is not through Ronald Reagan. It's going to get done through the four Democrats that now run the governments of the four countries who are neighbors to Nicaragua. That's -- that's the ultimate solution. And I think -- I think that is what is going to help us out most.

Once the last of these presidents takes office, President Ordios (?) in Costa Rica, which is early May, I think they'll start coming together as a political force and they would just have to take this out of the hands of Ronald Reagan and make it a Central American solution, which it is, of essence, must be.

EDWARDS: What do you think the President will tell the House to get House members to pass the bill?

SEN. DURENBERGER: I'm sure he's going to tell them the same stuff he told the folks in New Orleans, those who oppose him are communist sympathizers and those who support him are, as he says in his broken German, "(words spoken in German) contra."

EDWARDS: Can we switch topics and talk about the fighting in the Gulf of Sidra? Did you think the U.S. did the right thing when it fired back at the Libyans?

SEN. DURENBERGER: I thought -- it really isn't my judgment, I guess. Right or wrong, the question is one of values and what are we trying to -- what are we trying to achieve. It strikes me that -- that if we're trying to aim at Qaddafi, we missed, in the sense that we have only elevated his stature. When the -- when the giant goes after the knat with a sledge hammer, it just -- and the knat escapes, it makes -- it makes the knat look much more like a hawk or an eagle.

-4-

So I, you know, I just imagine in the same situation I -- watching it from the outside, I would not have wasted the millions of dollars and resources to take a swat at the -- but I think the President needs to be able to make those judgments himself.

EDWARDS: Senator, thank you very much.

SEN. DURENBERGER: You're welcome.

EDWARDS: Senator David Durenberger is a Minnesota Republican and a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.